

I MUST SEE ROME.

A SERMON

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BY

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"Paul purposed to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must see Rome."—ACTS xix., 21.

EVEN now, when Rome is a ruin, the yearning to see Rome often becomes a passion. Around the fallen piles where were her palaces, there huddles only a handful of people, if they are compared with the millions who lived there in Paul's day. In the wreck of those palaces, they have found a statue here, a vase there, now a mosaic, now a gem ; and, from such raking in the ashes, they have collected museums which attract the world. "See Rome and die," is a proverb which speaks for this yearning. Most of you who are of my age will remember a pathetic story, in the First Class Book, of a poor student, who sold all his books for money to travel to Rome, looked once from a neighboring height upon the dome of St. Peter's and on the contour of the seven hills, and then went home not dissatisfied. Such is the passion now. Is it not a pleasure to think that Paul felt it then,—Paul, who has made our modern life? This text is not the first glimpse that we have of the eagerness in choice of objects for travel of this prince of gentlemen. There is a glimpse of it as he seeks Athens, with the eagerness with which a man of letters seeks Athens now. There is a glimpse of it as he goes down to the field of Troy to read his Homer, where Alexander read his, where Hecuba wept and Hector died. In his after life, in this little glimpse of hopes and projects, it is quite of course that he who has seen Corinth and Athens should long to see in their places the masters of Corinth and Athens. With him, it is not what it is with us, merely the wish to see masterpieces of art which have been carried to the capital to adorn her galleries. Paul has dealt with Gallio, and he would be glad to deal with Seneca. He has seen pro-consuls, he will be glad to see the emperor. And then what Rome is to-day gives only the outline of what Rome was then.

Cæsar's palace stood glorious, where we now trace its ruins with difficulty. Temples, gigantic piles for baths, aqueducts which carried rivers of water to supply them, where we see only lines of broken arches; the forum crowded with loungers to be counted by thousands, where to-day the traveller presses a fern or picks up a bit of marble; ranges of statues, from which we admire a single torso,—all these glories were in their exact perfection. It is in the eagerness to see all this with his own eyes that Paul so confidently speaks. There is an earlier intimation of the same yearning in the epistle to the little handful of Christians in Rome. He tells them that he shall stop and see them, when he makes his journey into Spain. There is the eager pressure on him to carry over the world this gospel which is to renew the world. And, of course, to a man who had the just pride of a leader, there was the eager desire to stand in the city which commanded, and to deal with leaders. "I must see Rome."

Two or three years pass by, and Paul does see Rome. And he comes not as he had expected. To Athens he had come, a solitary traveller, in advance of his companions; and he waited for them there. When he landed at Neapolis, with the eager curiosity with which an Asiatic must always look on Europe for the first time, it was with these same companions,—two or three of them,—glad to leave the discomfort of a Greek fishing-boat. In both these cases, he had come because he chose to come; and, though it were in simple array, still he had travelled as a freeman travels. But, when he sees Rome at last, where the Appian Way passes Albano, it is under the escort of a company of soldiers, in a travelling party of prisoners, of whom he is one, in the weather-worn array of those who left the East some six months before, and who have been shipwrecked since. He comes, because he must come,—a file of soldiers before and a file behind. To carry his humble packs, there trudge at the right and left a glad company of Christian disciples, who have come out from the city to greet him and to meet him. It is the cordial welcome which the poorest give the poorest; and this welcome has already given Paul courage. They rise on the gentle slope of the roadway; and one of the most experienced runs forward and points to the north, where the towers rise white against the blue. "Ecce, Roma!" he cries; and Paul sees Rome.

So different is the fulfilment of our most careful plans from the hope and prayer with which we make them. Paul means to go to Rome as a leader and teacher. He comes here as a prisoner, waiting his trial. Such certain result, steady and unflinching, achieved in ways most unexpected, is the delight of poetry and imaginative fiction. The astrologer prophecies that the prince shall be killed on his birthday. The fond father shuts him up in his palace, that there may be no possible murderer. And on the morning of the birthday, as the young man lifts down a melon from the shelf, the fatal knife slips, falls, strikes his heart, and his father finds him cold in his own life-blood. All such tales spring from such experiences as Paul's. The end comes by ways the most improbable. Man proposes his course, and that course fails. But all the same, in the steady march of days and years, the end is sure. He sees Rome. Men and women of intense purpose come to hate slavery. They combine against it, they preach and prophesy against it. Their method is the dissolution of the Union and the downfall of the Constitution. And they live to see their purpose accomplished, in a war for the preservation of the Union and the maintenance of the Constitution. Every method they proposed is thrown on one side, but the great purpose for which they prayed is granted. The Pope is eager to do something for the glory of God worthy the see of Rome. He builds St. Peter's, with its matchless architecture. To meet the cost, he sends out the agents, who shall sell indulgences North, South, East, and West. This profligate offer of tickets, sold for money with which to enter heaven, touches the torpid conscience of the world. Half Europe rises in protest against him and his, turns them out of doors forever. And so the real glory of God is advanced, and his true worship secured, as it could not be by a thousand shrines more glorious than St. Peter's. All the history of the world is thus the history of progress which no man has dared foresee. And history owes its charm to such surprises. Who reads wisely is always coming upon the story of men who have "builed better than they knew."

In grateful recognition of the share of a good God in such unexpected victories, men refer them naturally to what we call "Providence," for want of a better word. What we mean is the underflow and constant presence of the eternal law of right, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Of course, we puzzle ourselves, if we imagine an outside God contriving,

centuries in advance, a certain mechanical success, like checkmate on the chess-board of history, and for hundreds of years pushing up pawns and pieces till he has secured it. That is only a puzzle. But there is no such puzzle when we see God as the present conscious power which works for righteousness, when we see that right because it is right must produce right and succeed, while wrong because it is wrong can produce nothing, and must fail. If we see this, we find real meaning in the Scripture statements that we are working together with God. Those statements are not figurative. Paul, for instance, is at work in this way. Paul knows what he wants: he wants to strike at centres. As Jesus bade him, he wants to work in the cities, and not stand chattering with wayfarers. He has seen the little cities: he must see the great city. He has seen pro-consuls: he must see the men who sent them. His own plan is to weave enough tent-cloth and to make enough tents, to hire a wretched steerage passage to Ostia, and then to throw himself on the kindness of the Roman Church. But he is no stickler for method. What is important is the object, and he keeps his end in sight. At last, a prisoner before Felix and Agrippa, he sees his chance. "I appeal to Cæsar," he cries. And from that moment he is Cæsar's ward. Rome must care for him, Rome must protect him, Rome must feed him and clothe him. In that happy word, Paul compels Nero to bring to Rome the man whose word and work are in the end to overthrow Nero's throne. This is it for a man like Paul to be fellow-workman with a present God.

It will help you and me in our frequent discouragements, if we can remember these great instances, whether in Scripture, in history, or in our own seeming failures, where the perfect end comes, steady and glorious as the march of Orion across the sky, though every device of ours to secure it seems to have broken down. I have no doubt that Paul was a good tent-maker. I suppose he knew how to choose his stuffs, where to buy the best needles and the best thread, how to cut the patterns with least waste, and how to meet the rightful demands of purchasers. But it was not by tent-making that Paul was to save the world. It was by this steady persistence of which this text gives one little sample. You see it in this trial before Felix, where he sacrifices the chance of immediate acquittal for what he values so much more,—the chance to plead before Seneca and Nero. He never forgets the underlying purpose to proclaim God, and

God at hand. And, because he never forgets it, this God who is at hand, this eternal Power who works for righteousness, always works for him. Here is the infinite alliance: if you do "accept the universe," your own method fails, but your infinite purpose is accomplished.

A father watches his only son as he might watch an orchid in a green-house,—never a frosty night, never a blast of cold, never sunshine too hot, never a draught of unaccustomed air. Ask him his purpose, he will say simply that he hopes himself to help in answering the Saviour's prayer, and makes these arrangements all in the wish that the boy may be shielded from all temptation. Loyal and thoughtful father! What he can he does, as best he sees and knows. But, as it happens, God knows better. One night the father dies. The wind blows the next morning, and the whole card-castle of his fortune falls. That petted boy is turned out upon the street with nothing, as we say. By which we mean he has nothing but the memory of an earthly father's integrity and the certainty of a heavenly Father's present love. If he has these, he has the whole,—he has enough and more. It is enough to put him on the very path his father sought for him. It is enough to train him in that integrity which made his father's only prayer. It is enough to teach him how to stand upon his own feet, fight his own battle, and with his own arm win God's victory. The father's method has failed; but his wish is answered, because he did not work alone, but was a fellow-workman with God.

Or you find it hard to lift your daily life above things, things that "perish in the using." Bread and butter, clothes and fashion, house-rent and insurance and fuel, the summer's journey and the winter's repair, are too much for you. You hear preaching and hymns about another life, but it does not seem to be for you. You know people who talk of heaven as if it were as near them as the next room, but it does not seem so to you. Still, you wish it were; and you try for it. You go to the minister's Bible-class, and that does not help you. You read Thomas à Kempis, and that does not help you. You try the bold experiment of a revival, and that does not help you. Dear child, the good God is as eager for you as you are for yourself. He has his ways, as you have yours. What if it happen, that, in face of your best provisions, nay, without granting your most eager prayer, he lift your darling baby from your arms, and fold the child gently in his own? What if he take your treasure from your home

here to your other home there? What he means is that where your treasure is your heart shall be also. Life is where those are whom we love. And from that moment the heaven is nearer to you which seemed so far away. You had your way to seek it: he has his for you to find it. And you will find it, if you trust these constant currents of his love.

From every place to every other place there are a thousand possible ways,—nay, a million. It is not the little choice of the township in the wilderness, where the puzzled traveller is told that he may either take the hill road or the meadow road or the road between. In those courses of life which we are studying, our problem is more like that of the navigator, when he has come into the offing and taken his “departure.” His home is blue behind him, his port is on the other side of the world, and the ways thither are infinite in number, not two or three alone. The great circle is the shortest. But the great circle may cross a continent,—most likely will,—and he must go by sea. He must take a part of another great circle, and then a part of another, and then a part of a third, and even more. And he must consider the great sea-currents, the gulf stream, and the rest. He must remember the trade winds, and he must avoid centres of calm. Nay, when he has started on the best plan which an angel could propose to him, there may come a tempest which shall drive him from his track. It may leave his vessel so shattered that she can only run before the wind. So that his choice is to be made between so many courses, not to-day only, but every day. Each day will have its right course and its wrong. And the tack which was the right tack with the wind of yesterday may be the wrong tack with the wind of to-day. But here the parallel with the voyage of life ends. For the voyage of the seas, before we trust ship and cargo to such varied contingencies, we insist that the commander shall have had experience of every sea, and of calm and storm. But, for the voyage of life, we need make no such demand. In that voyage, all that is asked of any of us is a loyal desire to succeed. The man who intentionally turns backward, and tries to go backward, succeeds in going backward. The man who tries for nothing, but lies as on the painted surface of a painted sea, goes nowhere. But the man who loyally tries to make the voyage God proposes, finds in the vessel beneath him and the skies above him an infinite purpose and power which commands success. He

may not gain it by the route he first proposed. He may be disappointed in his second. But he cannot go wrong. He works with God, and in God's time he finds his goal. He starts to see the city which hath foundations ; and in the end, though he be storm-tost on the way, shipwrecked perhaps, stung by serpents or deserted by friends, in the end he rises, like Christian in the story, or like Paul when his long task is over, the last height is surmounted, and the city is there.

Only let a man have a purpose, and that purpose a godly purpose. "I must see Rome!" Must, because there was the best place to work, and the most work to do. As a greater than Paul, on a journey more critical, said, "I must work to-day, to-morrow, and the day following ; for a prophet cannot perish out of Jerusalem." The prospect is death. The certainty is what men call failure, "cruel mockings, and scourgings" ; but the result as certain is the salvation of the world.

It is not the way you or I would have devised. No Tacitus or Seneca of those times would have planned it. The world is to be lifted to a nobler life. Men are to rule themselves, not to be ruled by princes. Women are to be free, not prisoners or slaves. There is to be no slavery. Sickness is to become less and less. Pain is to be forgotten. Men and women are to live for each other, and bear each other's burdens. For this, a carpenter from the hills of Galilee is to proclaim the present God. For this, he is to come to Jerusalem to proclaim him. For this, he is to be nailed to the cross, and die. Yes ; and because he comes, because he dies, man is free and woman is free. Sickness, pain, and even death, are less frequent and less. Men live as brothers more and more ; and in a common life they bear each other's burdens. So orders his Father and our Father, his God and our God. So rules the infinite Power which makes for righteousness.